

**NEED TO READ**

**ONLINE**  
wnypapers.com



► Village of Lewiston gets favorable financial review; looks to shore up public safety

► CAO providing immediate utility relief services, winter items for families in need

► New Yorkers 60 years of age and older, additional public facing essential workers will be eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccine

► Ten Lives Club puts on photo shoot for cats to make them feel like celebrities

► Eastern Hills Mall launches 'Off-Broadway Market'

► Q&A: Elizabeth 'Bitsie' Tulloch on a more grown-up 'Superman & Lois'



► Communities embrace Northern Niagara Regional Trail Network

In print and online, we are your No. 1 source for local news  
**Niagara Frontier Publications and**  
www.wnypapers.com

# Opinions

Use of all submitted letters and editorials is at the discretion of Niagara Frontier Publications. All entries should include the writer's/organization's name, number and address. Submissions, which may be edited for content/style/accuracy, do not necessarily reflect the opinion of NFP staff.

## The concept of free speech

**BY JUDY PATRICK**

New York Press Association

Americans learned a lot about government – especially that once-obscure process of impeachment – in the past year. But over time we've lost ground when it comes to understanding and embracing our democracy's basic values.

That loss goes a long way to explaining our political division, brutal lack of civility in public discourse and erosion of trust in our basic institutions.

Many people know basic events and processes of U.S. history. We remember, from our school days, the three branches of government, the concept of separation of powers and how a bill becomes a law.

But Americans themselves are increasingly saying they aren't living up

to the democratic ideals and principles on which our country was founded. And fewer people see some principles, such as freedom to peacefully protest, as very important at all.

The fundamental value of our democracy, for example, is self-government. Yet just 62% of citizens voted in the 2020 presidential election, turnout considered high compared to previous elections.

The findings are part of the Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel 2020 study of U.S. democracy. While large majorities of Americans agree on the importance of a number of democratic principles, the survey found clear disagreement about how well the country is doing living up to those principles.

Take the freedom to protest, for

example. The share of Americans who say the phrase "people are free to protest" describes the U.S. very or somewhat well fell from 73% in 2018 to 60% in 2019, according to the survey.

The concept of free speech is easy to love until you hear something especially distasteful. That's why understanding the reasons free speech are important is necessary to give life to the concept. Government transparency seems like a good idea until you're a public school teacher with your salary posted for all to see.

Learning how a bill becomes a law is fairly simple. Understanding the value of hearing all sides of the debate on that bill is more difficult. Wading through a torrent of misinformation, spin and hyperbole is enough to make most people walk away in frustration.

Certainly there's a need for re-energizing civics education for our schoolchildren. That work has been neglected for far too long. But adults, too, need to work harder at understanding the past, the present and the future of our democratic system. For them, the best learning tool may be the newspaper on their doorstep.

Newspapers do more than report on the village board meeting or school board election. Solid reporting offers clarity. Attention to detail and truth creates trust. The focus on community generates mutual respect. Being a watchdog underscores the value of good government. By listening, we promote dialogue. And by doing all of this edition after edition, they slowly fortify our democracy.

## 'In the Loop' with the Lewiston-Porter Board of Education

### BOE hears on student challenges, hopes and goals in 2021-22

**BY JODEE RIORDAN**

Board of Education President

The Lewiston-Porter Board of Education met this week for an extensive work session.

Before I report out on this work, I would like to update the community on efforts to return students to campus. As discussed earlier, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) and New York State Education Department (NYSED) are reviewing some key elements of public health policy directly affecting school operations, specifically the mandatory 6 feet of distance rule in schools. There have been no definitive changes issued yet at the state level, and the Niagara County Department of Health confirmed guidance has not been amended regarding social distancing and/or requirements on barrier use at this time.

Lewiston-Porter must maintain 6 feet of distance at all times, barrier or no barrier. That said, the district continues to plan multiple scenarios to bring our students back full-time, five days per week, as soon as deemed possible.

Things can change very quickly, and when we are able, Lewiston-Porter will be prepared to safely return students for greater in-person learning. We remain optimistic that we will be able to do so this school year.

At Monday's work session, representatives from the superintendent's student advisory council shared their perspectives on education at Lewiston-Porter during the pandemic, from the closure on March 2020 to the present. The superintendent's student advisory council is a group of 50 student leaders (grades 7-12) that meet three times per year to share concerns with Superintendent Paul Casseri and help

guide district decision-making. Their presentation is traditionally a highlight of the board's year, as it is an opportunity to hear directly from Lew-Port students as to their priorities – all the more important this year with the challenges we have faced.

Student presentations included:

- Rachel Del Castillo (grade 11), who presented on the "Challenges" Lew-Port students face. Staying motivated topped the list, along with learning retention. "We're learning the material, yes ... but are we retaining the knowledge?" she asked.

Del Castillo outlined the challenges teachers face in prioritizing elements of the standard curriculum, and the need to focus on preparing for tests (select Regents exams will be required this year) at the expense of a full curricular experience. The lack of face-to-face time with teachers has also made it difficult to find help at times. She discussed the lack of social time at school, and that it has made it hard to stay close with friends. The pandemic has also limited opportunities for musicians and actors to perform, athletes to compete, and extracurricular clubs to meet – all contributing to a less-satisfying high school experience.

- Sarina Singh (grade 10) presented on the "Strengths." As challenging as the past year has been, there have been positive aspects. She said students have learned independence, and the commitment to learning on their own. They have had the opportunity to learn about their own learning styles, what works best for them and how to employ these strategies. She said the use of technology and student/teacher innovation has been a positive aspect of the past year, and one that will benefit both students and teachers going forward.

"Virtual Mondays have been a positive experience. They offer teachers a chance for full recap of learning with the entire class," she said of the weekly virtual learning day in the hybrid model. "Virtual snow days" are also a positive, as learning can now continue uninterrupted during inclement weather and families can plan those days off (now added to the calendar as recess days).

Singh also noted the closure/current learning models has pushed students to think and start planning for their own studies after high school.

- Katie Kremer (grade 11) spoke to the "Hopes" students have in terms of the last 10 weeks of 2020-21.

"We need to strike a balance with safety protocols and more in-person or face-to-face time," she stated.

Kremer said there is a specific need for more in-person learning days to help prepare for Advanced Placement (AP), Regents and final exams. She expressed that students may benefit from retaining "Virtual Mondays" once they are able to return to campus full-time, providing an opportunity for transition and echoing the positive view students have.

She said students would like to see musical performances resume in the spring, noting they could move outside. Students also want to plan for a fuller prom and graduation experience for the Class of 2021, and a more traditional full school year experience for the Class of 2022. If possible, the Class of 2021 would like to see some of the traditional fall experiences that had to be canceled (like the powder-puff game) rescheduled for spring.

- "Looking forward" to the 2021-22 school year, Nathan Rhoads (grade 11) discussed student priorities. He said students are hopeful for a full

reopening in September. This must include a review of curriculum and assessment of learning that took place in 2020-21 centered on remediation and review, and a focus on student social-emotional wellbeing.

Rhoads said students recommend bringing a full-time social worker to the middle school and high school (one at each building). Dr. Patricia Grupka, assistant superintendent for administrative services, confirmed this position is planned and budgeted for in 2021-22.

Rhoads also stressed the need to help get students back into good habits, explaining that sleep schedules and use of free time are pretty lax currently. A focus on teaching and improving time management skills would be important as students transition back.

He concluded with the hope to re-establish the traditional school events that Kremer spoke of – homecoming, powderpuff, the high school musical, concerts, prom and graduation.

The Board of Education then had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss with the students the key points of their presentation. We will take the recommendations and concerns of the SSAC into advisement as we continue with budget development and planning for the 2021-22 school year.

Next time, "In the Loop" will look at budget development and planning for a districtwide solar project as presented at Monday's work session. You can watch the recording of the work session on the Lew-Port website (www.lew-port.com) or YouTube Channel.

The BOE will meet next Monday, March 22, and we encourage you to join us via Zoom. Meeting credentials are posted on the Lew-Port homepage.

## Niagara County Tribune/Sentinel

Founded February 14, 1987

**PUBLISHER**

Skip Mazenauer

**GM/MANAGING EDITOR**

Joshua Maloni

**EDITOR IN CHIEF/SENTINEL EDITOR**

Terrence P. Duffy

**ERIE COUNTY EDITOR**

Karen Keefe

**WEBSITE/SOCIAL MEDIA EDITORS**

Joshua Maloni, Lucia Spiritosanto,

Toni Snyder

**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVES**

Colleen Rebmann, Jeff Calarco,

Marcy Lombardo

**CIRCULATION**

Kim Wendt

**ACCOUNTING/OFFICE MANAGER**

Kim Wendt

**PRODUCTION MANAGER/ GRAPHIC DESIGNER**

Wendy Juzwicki

**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS**

Lucia Spiritosanto, Toni Snyder

**CLASSIFIED MANAGER**

Toni Snyder

**ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

Jennifer Walowitz

**CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS/REPORTERS**

Michael J. Billoni, Kevin and Dawn Cobello,

Michael DePietro, Nathan Keefe,

Wayne Peters, Mark Williams Jr.,

David Yarger

**©2021 Niagara Frontier Publications**

1859 Whitehaven Road  
Grand Island, N.Y. 14072

Phone (716) 773-7676  
Fax (716) 773-7190

**Editorial:**

Tribune@wnypapers.com

Dispatch@wnypapers.com

Sentinel@wnypapers.com

**Advertising:**

NFPDesign@wnypapers.com

**Classifieds:**

NFPClassifieds@wnypapers.com

**Circulation:**

NFPCirculation@wnypapers.com

**Legals:**

legalnotice@wnypapers.com

**Website:**

wnypapers.com

**Grand Island Publishing Corp.** Newspaper is printed in the U.S.A. and all rights reserved. © 2021 by Grand Island Publishing Corp. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission of the publisher. Unsolicited manuscripts and photographs will be returned only if accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

All letters, news releases and photos received will be treated as unconditionally assigned for publication or brochure and are subject to Grand Island Publishing Corp's. unrestricted right to edit, comment or reject.

All original artwork, layout and design remain sole property of Grand Island Publishing Corp. Reproduction in whole or part of any advertisement is strictly forbidden.

Grand Island Publishing Corp. will not be liable for errors appearing in advertisements beyond replacement of the space occupied by the error. The publisher reserves the right to reject any adver-

tisement at his sole discretion. Notification must be made in writing within one week of publication. Verbal notifications will not be accepted.

Grand Island Publishing Corp. does not knowingly accept any kind of fraudulent advertising. We suggest you investigate thoroughly any advertisement before you reply.

Verbal cancellations will not be accepted. Written authorization to cancel a display or commercial classified ad must be received by Grand Island Publishing Corp. before deadline for insertion.

The Tribune is published weekly.

Display Ads Deadline: MONDAY 5 PM

New York State Press Association, Niagara County Builders Association, Grand Island Chamber of Commerce, Wheatfield Business Association Inc., Niagara River Region Chamber of Commerce, The Niagara USA Chamber.



**NIAGARA FRONTIER PUBLICATIONS**

